

Australia Honors Its Heroes

“Special” is a word that is too frequently applied, but on January 22, Australia Post issued a truly special stamp issue, in the form of two-stamp Victoria Cross mini-sheet and five stamps to honor recipients who earned Australia Post’s Legends Award.

The mini-sheet commemorates the first Victoria Cross awarded to an Australian. The Victoria Cross was instituted by Queen Victoria in 1856 to honor conspicuous bravery during the Crimean War, but was not awarded to an Australian until the Second Boer War of 1899–1902. During this conflict, in which Australians fought alongside South African and British forces, five Australians were honored with a Victoria Cross, the first being Captain Neville Howse.



The stamp design in the mini-sheet is based on an original one penny (1d) stamp issued by the colony of Victoria in May 1900 to raise funds for the Patriotic Fund for the Boer War. The design, which arose from a public competition, was modeled after the Victoria Cross medal.

Five of Australia’s most gallant and decorated soldiers have been immortalized on postage stamps as the recipients of the 2015 Australia Post Legends Award. These five Australians also have received the Victoria Cross, the highest honor that can be bestowed for acts of valor “in the presence of the enemy”.

The 2015 Australia Post Legends Award recipients are Keith Payne VC OAM, Mark Donaldson VC, Ben Roberts-Smith VC MG, Daniel Keighran VC and, for the first time in the Awards history, Legends status will be awarded posthumously to Cameron Baird VC MG. Corporal Baird was the 100th Australian to receive a Victoria Cross since the award was first created by Queen Victoria in 1856.

Ahmed Fahour, Australia Post Managing Director and CEO, said this year’s award honors five Australians who have demonstrated courage, commitment and the ultimate display of mateship: “These five men when faced with dangerous situations in their line of duty were selfless, devoted to their cause and committed to keeping their mates safe, for which sadly Corporal Baird paid the ultimate price.

“This year’s Legends Award recipients could not be more inspirational, particularly as we commemorate the ANZAC centenary and more than a century of service by Australian servicemen and women. It is our absolute honour to bestow this Award upon them.”

For the first time, Australia Post will donate \$1 to Legacy from selected products purchased from the Legends range. As one of Australia’s most iconic charities, Legacy grew out of the ashes of the Great War (World War I) and 90 years since its formation still supports around 90,000 families of Defence personnel who have given their lives or their health for their country. These families rely on Legacy for emotional and financial support in the aftermath of devastating circumstances.

The 2015 Australia Post Australian Legends were honored at official Australia Day Council events hosted in all capital cities, with the first luncheon taking place January 22 in Melbourne. Each Legend will also be presented with a 24-carat gold replica of their stamp.



Ben Roberts-Smith VC MG who was awarded the Victoria Cross for brave actions carried out during a mission in Tizak, Afghanistan in June 2010, said: “It is bit surreal but very humbling; you don’t join the Army with grand ideas of recognition and you certainly don’t anticipate that your image will one day appear on a postage stamp! My hope is that in some way, this stamp series will contribute to raising awareness of the fact there are enduring sacrifices being made by Australian soldiers and their families every day. This should never be forgotten and if Legacy and the support they provide our servicemen and women and their families will benefit from this Australia Post Legends series then I am honoured to participate and to offer my total support.”



Mark Donaldson VC who was awarded the Victoria Cross for rescuing an injured interpreter while under heavy fire in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, September 2008, said: “When I was younger I never could have imagined my face being on a stamp. But if my image on a stamp fosters thoughts of positivity, if it helps someone going through a rough time to give them some strength to be a better person, if it can reach that level then I think that’s an amazing thing. This is not just about me, it’s about my family, my friends, my mates back in my unit and their friends and families back home waiting too – but I’m thankful for the opportunity to be a part of it.”



Daniel Keighran VC who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his act of bravery during a three-hour firefight with insurgents at the Battle of Derapet in Afghanistan, August 2010, said: “It took me a little while to accept that this was really happening. I was extremely surprised and honoured. I think it’s good for people to hear the stories again. To be reminded of what some of the guys are committed to doing in the Australian Defence Force, what they have to give up, and what they’re willing to do for their mates – that’s a big part of who we are as Australians.”



Keith Payne VC OAM who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallant effort recovering injured troops while under heavy fire in Kon Tum Province, South Vietnam in 1969, said: “I think it’s great of Australia Post to recognise not only me, but the younger blokes. That’s the important part, to remind the younger generation that our service people are still there and they are doing a damn fine job.”



The Legends Award criteria honors living Australians who have made a unique contribution to Australia’s way of life, inspired the community and influenced the way Australians think about themselves and their country. The Award was initiated in 1997 when Sir Donald Bradman was the first living Australian to be honored on an Australian stamp. Prior to that the only living people honored on Australia’s stamps were members of the royal family.

The 2015 Legends are featured on 70c stamps, with all five Legends featured in a stamp pack, mini-sheet, first day cover and set of maxi cards. The Victoria Cross minisheet and the Legends stamps and associated products are available at www.auspost.com.au/stamps or contact the Australia Stamp Agency in North America toll free (USA and Canada) on 1-800-443-4225 while stocks last.